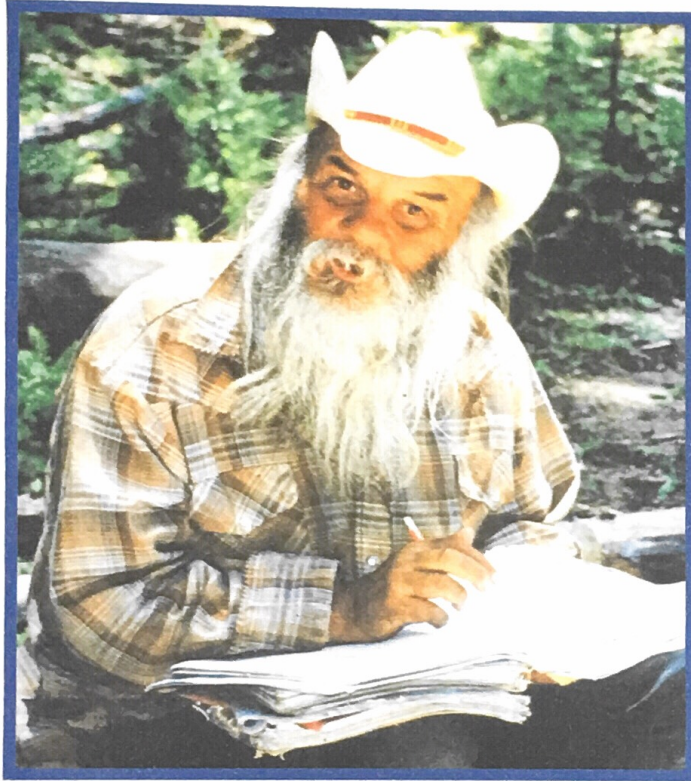




Rainbow Family Life Stories



*by Jodey Bateman.
Interviews with Rainbow
Family of Living Light
folks conducted between
1977 and 2008.*

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09.F CRAZY JOHN - "The Rainbow Sheriff"

15 pages

[09.F]

(323)

CRAZY JOHN - The Rainbow Sheriff

[He prefers to be called John Buffalo. He is the main surviving link between the old STP Family and the Shanti Sena Family that does security at Rainbow Gatherings.

Responsibility for basic security work at the gatherings often falls on men like John who are capable of using force as the ultimate argument - though these men continually urge women to take part to lessen the chance of having to use force.

John worked with a strongly feminist woman named Red Horse at the Michigan Gathering in 1983 to make sure there was a women's-only tipi where women might go for refuge if they had been victims of violence or simply as a place to relax and unwind from having to deal with male-female problems.

I have noticed at gatherings that men who are seen as "macho" like John are often the strongest supporters of greater participation by women and are depended on by some of the women with the strongest feminist positions. I think this is because many of these men have lived lives full of harshness and brutality - like John's life. Rainbow has given many of them what human dignity - and gentleness - they have known. They have become aware that if women are degraded, they will be degraded too and be right back in the conditions they came from.

Much of John's life like many white working class men of his generation, has been a painful struggle with the world views called "racism" and "sexism" which were imposed on him in his upbringing.]

JOHN - At times I feel like Don Quixote. I'm a gunfighter without the Old West. I used to come to these Rainbow Gatherings like a visiting celebrity, an Old West outlaw sheriff.

I was born in 1950 - November 28 in San Diego. I'm a direct descendant of William Clark Quantrell, the bloodiest man who

ever rode. Then I was adopted. My adopted dad was a dock foreman at the post office for 35 years. He could throw a 300-pound mail sack with one arm. When he was young, he could lay on his back and bench-press 500 pounds. You talk about the workers' struggle in America - a machine made my dad obsolete and he retired. When he was 63, he was called back to work on the Christmas rush. The machine fell on a man. All the young, strong guys couldn't lift up the machine. It was crushing the guy's rib cage. My dad - 63 years old - lifted the machine up off the guy and pushed it over the dock. Unconsciously he hated the machine so much.

Once in 1980 I went back to see my dad. He helped me in a bar room brawl. That night I told my dad, "I know we're not the same blood," and I pulled out my knife and cut my hand and drew blood. I handed my knife to my dad. He cut his hand and we held hands for three hours. We're one blood now.

I had a little brother who was a successful businessman. He owned a chain of head shops called Heads West. He died when he was 21.

I went through the basic school trip as far as ninth grade. At which point I was sitting in a classroom. The teacher hit me with a pointer because I said "Goddam!" in class. I said to myself I didn't have to take it no more. I just didn't go home that year. November 2, 1965, I went to Haight. I had never been stoned, never been laid before. I didn't really understand what was happening, but there was people that was free then. It was a different kind of street scene than when I was older.

I grew up in a Klan-oriented family. My uncle was an Imperial Wizard. I was a card-carrying Klansman from 1965 to 1970. For me it was just a status symbol. I seen a few contradictions to my beliefs, but nothing I couldn't get around. The Haight-Ashbury scene wasn't that integrated

325

There were just a few black people in the scene and you could stay away from them.

I was into peace then, into a lot of acid and free love - basically pretty good trips. I thought it was the answer at that time. But then I saw that scene couldn't last much longer. There was a kind of inner turmoil in it. I saw a lot of friends of mine were getting away from acid and peace and more into alcohol. I had some lady problems. So I left for Colorado in mid-1967.

For the first eight or nine months I hung out in Boulder, Colorado on the Hill. The Hill was like next to the college - student-oriented shops, little restaurants. A lot of the students there was into the Cause and getting more and more into drugs, just general Movement activities. I found it really easy to hang out, really easy to get meals, really easy to get stoned, really easy to get laid. Those old days were a lot different than today. There were a lot of runaway girls then.

At which point I moved up to Peaceful Valley, which is just outside of Nederland, 17 miles from Boulder up in the mountains.

That was basically the start of my life hanging out in the mountains, which I still do. I really copped a lot of love for the mountains and like, to a lot of the simple things that got important. Simple things that you just take for granted like getting a Three Musketeers candy bar or drinking a Coke or a beer at a store.

Around this time, 1968 period, I hung out with the STP Family and a lot of the Motherfuckers. I was the first one that met STP John. I was sitting in Boulder Central Park when he first came with the other STP and the Motherfuckers. The Motherfuckers attacked heroin pushers in the street in New York and they had to leave there. The STP were somewhat younger than the Motherfuckers. I took them to Peaceful Valley and helped them set up Buccaneer

Camp. The land actually belonged to the Bureau of Mines. Before this when there was no STP Family, a whole bunch of us moved up above Ward and setup a camp that fluctuated from 50 to 200 people. Also we had numerous other camps throughout the mountains west of Boulder. The STP Family was a small segment of the population of these camps. Alcohol was prevalent in all the camps but seemed most used by the STP Family. I drank a lot of booze and got stoned a lot with them people - Frank Motherfucker, Danny Motherfucker. Mike Motherfucker was one of my good friends.

Money seemed to flow fairly easily those days from sale of legit drugs - like pot and a lot of reds. A lot of the energy later turned into rip-offs but at the start it was legit. Almost every day there was a mass exodus of funky rigs and hitch hikers going down the road from Peaceful Valley into Boulder.

One of the things I used to do besides sell drugs was recover old ore cars and mining equipment from mines in the area that had shut down before the turn of the century. I would sell them to restaurants and other businesses in the Boulder and Denver area for landscaping.

Also at that time I got into leatherwork which has been a part of my life for the last 17 years [as of 1985]. Lots of leather-patched pants and old vests and pouches and belts - some of which I traded or sold for money for beer. It's kind of funny to watch the progression of leatherwork and where people I know have taken their leatherwork today.

That summer I went to Chicago to the Democratic Convention with a lady named Donna. We hitch hiked there. I didn't even know what was gonna go on there

(327)

except that it was a gathering and something to do. I heard about it because a lot of people were going and I heard a lot of talk. The Convention was the first time I ever wore a cowboy hat. I got chased by the cops. They didn't catch me. I hid in a garbage can under all kinds of milk cartons for hours and hours. When I got out, I was clobbered in the back when I was running from the cops. It wasn't serious.

I knew STP John that died on the Hill in Boulder. He wore white all the time - a robe sometimes and pants sometimes and he was a vegetarian. STP John was killed while I was taking my first trip to Tucson. Right after he was killed, Deputy Dog was killed on a mountain side. His body was found in a mine shaft. LB and Bishop, two New York STP people, got it on the Hill.

I was hanging out with the STP Family, but not as much as a lot of people did. I enjoyed hanging out with them except for sporadic acts of violence which broke out in the STP camp in Peaceful Valley.

STP wasn't an organization - just a loosely knit group of brothers and sisters. In 1968 when the STP Family first came from New York to Colorado, a lot of people were coming from California to Colorado to escape the earthquake that was supposed to happen. There were all kinds of families in Colorado then - the STP Family, the Motherfuckers, the Asshole Family, the Colorado Kids, the MDA Family. A lot of them went into the Rainbow Family later.

STP is a part of life I don't think about because I went through a lot of mental turmoil, mental pain, and I did a lot of things I wouldn't do now. I used to be a rip-off, more or less get it while you can. Love got me out of it, I suppose, caring for my brothers and sisters. I finally left hanging out all the time with the STP. By hanging out at Buccaneer camp I discovered my love for the woods. I was in Buccaneer camp for a year.

and a half before I left. Buccaneer Camp was on the downswing by then.

At that point I discovered a cabin above Central City, Colorado and I got an old lady named Donna.

I tried to raise a dog and lived off food stamps. I went down to try to get Social Security money and they made me go see a psychiatrist. He said I was a paranoid schizophrenic, so I began collecting crazy money. Social Security gave me \$164 a month, which was a lot of money to me, coming from the streets. Me and my old lady ate steaks every day. We had a good old time.

We got to know the woods better. We didn't see a whole lot of people around. We learned to be alone a lot. We got to know each other better. I did a lot of hunting, grew a small garden - didn't grow a whole lot because the growing season in Colorado is kind of short. Also we were at a high altitude. We would walk to the top of the mountains to watch the sun come up - things which you can't do when you got a whole shitload of people around.

Most of the time when I went to Central City to have any dealings with the Social Security people or any officials, I felt kind of dumb. A lot of times these people wanted me to fill out some forms and my knowledge of spelling wouldn't take me very far. I got in a lot of fights in Central City - rednecks getting in my way, threatening my existence. I was the only hippie in Central City. At the same time I had trouble with the Bureau of Land Management [BLM] wanting me to leave my cabin because it was on BLM land and it's illegal to live in a permanent structure on BLM land.

In 1972, things got progressively worse with the BLM people.

Finally it got to be an out-and-out confrontation. They got irritated at me enough to burn down my cabin—which they did—under the table. And my dog got killed, which irritates the shit out of me still. They didn't officially cop to it, but they did it. This part of my life, I don't talk about too much, because I get too irritated. My old left me in the process of all this happening. We got really irritated, which led to us breaking up.

After that I went to the 1972 Rainbow Gathering at Granby, Colorado. That one reminded me of the earlier days when I had hung around San Francisco. It was good because I felt a lot of love there and I had a lot of hate in my soul from fucking around with them BLM people.

I left the gathering and started hanging around on the street in Boulder because I didn't have much of a home anymore. I got more into the wine scene than dope. I drank almost every day. My attitude towards people went steadily downhill. I worked off and on at a bar. Then the Carnival Cafe vegetarian restaurant happened and I started hanging out there. I felt a lot of love and a strong unity with the people there, though they were in a lot different space than I was.

I went to camp with the Rainbow people in Highbridge Park, Washington, in 1974. Then I went back to Boulder and hung out at the Carnival Cafe and worked at Shannon's Bar. Then in 1975, I moved out to Eugene, Oregon. I hung out around White Bird Free Clinic because it was an easy place to hang around, went out to Cougar Hot Springs a lot—drinking quite a bit, but not nearly as much as I had in Colorado. Then I went to the 1976 Rainbow Gathering in Montana.

To me it's a life style—I am a peacekeeper at the gathering, definitely. A sheriff at the Montana Gathering offered to send me to police school. I said, "I could never be a sheriff." And he said, "You're more of a sheriff than I could ever hope to be."

Since then I have been hanging out with the Rainbow Family a lot. I went to the 1977 Gathering in New Mexico. Me and Phil Coyote nearly joined the Christ Family. I'm a master leather worker, but I burned

some of my leather and went barefoot. But I really dig killing, sex and materialism. It's fun to look at the soft eyes of a deer and then squeeze of a shot and then when you pick it up, the blood of that woods creature flows over your clean clothes. I've shot damn near every game animal in North America except polar bear and grizzly bear. I never killed an animal in my life that I haven't pulled out the heart and ate it raw.

At the New Mexico Gathering one night, Gypsydake and Two Feather found an Indian skull. They wanted to take the teeth and put them in a necklace. I took the skull away from them and took it back to the cave where they got it. I was tripping on peyote. I turned around and there was a spirit—the most beautiful Indian woman I had ever seen. She led me back to the camp.

There was a guy at New Mexico—Terrible Tom—the worst guy who's ever been at a gathering. He went looking for pregnant women to kick in the stomach. He kicked five of them. He came at me with a knife and I knocked him out. Lee Jones, the sheriff of Catron County, New Mexico, and me, we had a good thing going at the gathering. We shot up signs and drank whiskey. We hugged each other before Lee left the gathering.

After that I went to a bar in La Mesa, California and some guy pinched another guy's old lady on the ass. The other guy pulled a pistol to shoot him and shot me in the leg. Then I hung out in Takelma, Oregon. In October '77, I got together with Laurel—also called Cindy—who had a baby named Cinnamon who was born at the New Mexico Gathering. She was living with David Beck with then. In our little security camp clan, we're one big incestuous family. Almost all the men have slept with almost all the women.

During this time I lived in my bus in Takelma and hosted

numerous Rainbow Family and other hippies. I started to grow pot in the hustle bustle of the southern Oregon pot scene. I'm torn about growing pot. I think pot should be a free trade item, but if someone offered me \$2,000 for it, I'd take it. It's contradictory, I know, but I'm human. I don't even like smoking pot that much. Pot is one of the few ways that we counter-culture people can rise above the poverty level without having to live in the inner city.

I taught Laurel how to tan hides and how to butcher deer and elk and bear. I didn't voice it, but I realized I am a truly great hunter. The subject I know more about than any other goddam thing is guns and hunting. I had an M-16. I never liked it. I kept it because when I was in the pot fields and I thought somebody was coming and I went out with it, I was a terrifying son of a bitch.

Pumba, a black guy, and Leonard, another black, and Leille, a white woman, became friends of mine in '77 and '78 and before I knew it, they became family. This was one of the first times in my life when I had risen above bullshit racism. There was a number of blacks in STP in the old days. Black Otis, Governor. Dee was the only black woman. The STP Family was like the Rainbow Family in that though we camped together much of the time, in the Family there were separate clans. The blacks just weren't in my group - not in the group I continually associated with. I could always talk to blacks and associate with them, but I didn't regard them as brothers.

Pumba and Leonard were different because in spite of all the bullshit I seemed to lay out, both of them seemed to know I was a brother and cut me the slack which I needed for my consciousness to grow. We all kind of came to the conclusion that racism is a tool of the upper classes to keep the lower classes from uniting and rising above the poverty level and getting a slice of the pie. That was definitely a new thought to me. I told my uncle, the Imperial Wizard of the Klan, what I thought up with Pumba. He thought about it a long time.

In February, 1978, while playing with guns outside my bus, I accidentally slipped while drawing a .357 revolver from a new holster and proceeded to shoot my foot. My foot was in a cast and I had to keep it elevated until I went to the Oregon Gathering. Shooting myself in the foot was such a serious thing that I was almost a cripple for life. I had to begin looking at myself, at the way I was relating to myself and other folks. I saw my own foolishness and stupid macho attitudes which seem to have been forced on men from the time we're boys by the society in which we live.

Although I made a very stupid mistake, I feel it opened up vast doors and many learning experiences for me. I feel it was one of the major turning points of my life, as at this point I began to see where I had made a lot of mistakes. I began to learn to deal with things on a more high conscious level, above and beyond what I thought it possible for me to do. I began to realize my power as a moving force among men. I have realized since 1978 that it's a sacred trust that I share with people like Barry and Jayson and Feather and even Michael John.

I went to the Arizona Gathering. It was one big hassle to put it lightly. Laurel somewhat enjoyed it, although one of the low points in my life happened at the gathering. I went with Laurel to Holbrook to help get some shop lifters out of jail. I had to sleep by the side of the road because some people needed our car to go on a food run. I woke up that morning to screaming cars and busted glass. There was a wreck. I'm fairly well trained to deal with things like that. There were four people in the wreck. A three-year-old child died in my arms.

333

Laurel went back to the gathering in a pickup truck. I went to a bar to get a snort of whiskey. Then Edwin, the sheriff, came and got me. He said, "We got to go, man. There's a car wreck on the way to the gathering. Everybody's dead." We went there at 70 miles an hour. Three people out of 11 died. There were broken backs, broken legs. There was one body cut in two with glass. Two cops threw up. Me and Edwin, the sheriff, were the only ones who could deal with the gore. We picked up a body and the intestines slapped against my leg. I went to the OK Corral in Alpine where the Family took care of drunks. I was thirsty. I drank a whole jar of Koolaid. This girl told me I drank all their LSD. The whole OK Corral told me how greedy I was, so I told all those people who were beating on drums and tripping on acid what I had seen. I didn't have a bummer on the acid. I went back and hugged Laurel and stuck to her because of the blood on me.

Two drunk Indians were driving the vehicle that wrecked. It put such an impression on my brain, I hate drunk Indians. Later I was in a bar and a drunk Indian talked about how the whites took their land away and I said, "We're still tougher than you, you red punk!" I beat him up. He was just crushed. I know I was wrong, but if an Indian or a Mexican or a black says I'm fucked up because I'm white, I'll beat them up. It's hard for me. I won't deny blacks have had a hard row to hoe, but we're all got to work on it. It's not black or white. It's right and wrong.

I didn't go to the West Virginia Gathering next year. I broke up with Laurel because of my inability to cope with our relationship. Laurel came unglued because one time we were making love and I got a craving for a Coke. I stopped making love and reached over in a cooler and got a fucking Coke and drank it. I was hot and sweaty. I just wanted to be able to make love to Laurel better. I didn't

know how to express myself so much then. Also I blame the pressures of commercial pot growing for working on my brain and making me an intolerable human being for Laurel. We had a kid - Eli Buffalo - April 5, 1981, a little after we broke up.

I went to the Washington Gathering and did security. Nothing big happened. The Idaho Gathering was a drain on me. On June 14, the second day at the site, I got back from going on a food run to Council, Idaho. When I got back and got my van parked, me and Barry were informed that a mob was coming down with rocks, sticks and knives because they figured we had been eating high on the hog while they were eating burnt millet. I got under my van with my nine millimeter and my Winchester.

I was jerking cartridges into my Winchester and people wondered what I was doing. It looked like a scene from the fucking Wild West. I said once they came across the road, I would shoot them in the fucking knees. I was out there shouting orders. Men were moving around with rifles. We had the vans and buses circled up. The mob was headed off by Rowdy.

I own ten acres of dense woodland in Southern Oregon and one acre in Humboldt County, California. I pay the taxes on it. You bet your life I ain't gonna hippie out and lose land I could pass on to my boy. The last few years my life has been surrounded by growing dope, but in 1983 I didn't plant any. I was in this whole other direction.

Me and this girl named Carol hitch hiked from Humboldt County. We were gonna go through Glenwood, New Mexico and see Jay Sun and Feather. Time wouldn't allow us to do that and get to Phoenix to the Grateful Dead concert. So when we got to the concert, I seen Feather with Steve. I asked her where Jay Sun was and she informed me that they had split up. She handed me some Michigan Gathering invitations to pass out.

I came through Glenwood in May. Basically I was gonna take care of Feather's place while she went to the gathering. Me and Feather had discussed having a Southwest Regional Gathering before she left to go to the Michigan Gathering. Me and Sundown and Shepherd stayed at her land to keep things together during Feather's absence. Until June 26, at which point Feather called and said she would get me to the gathering at all costs. I paid for half a plane ticket, Steve paid for the other half. I drove Jayson's truck to Albuquerque and left it at the airport, which Jayson said left him at the end of his rainbow rope. I flew up to Iron City, Michigan and got to the gathering on the 28th.

I went up to the gathering and found myself sucked up in it up to my neck before I even got to the site. I went up to the site and looked for Feather's camp. I found Feather's tent and found an angel there instead. I've always liked Jayson. If I felt like Jayson would not like me to be with Feather, I wouldn't be her lover. I'd rather have two friends.

During the gathering I dealt with security problems as usual, though there were fewer security problems than any other gathering I had ever been at. My energy and consciousness remained at a level unequalled in the past. I felt a steadier growth in my ability to deal with folks in a positive but assertive manner and my ability to keep my center while dealing with other folks' problems.

My body is starting to go out on me. I can still hold my own in any sort of scrape, but the years are taking it. I've been shot five times and I've had three bouts with alcoholism. So I've started learning to use my mouth working for me more diplomatic. The last few years have come easier to me. I fuck up 10,000 times, but somewhere in me, there's something—there's power.

That was the first year I didn't carry a gun at gatherings. Before that, I had a big leather pouch with a .357 Magnum—best man-killer ever made. If I ever decided to use it, it would have been the ultimate defense.

Much of the gathering me and Feather spent together becoming lovers. It seemed to be the most positive thing for both of us - an open, caring, human relationship. What a treat! Compared to the normal, dull, bull shit relationship life seems to throw at us. During the last three days that we were at the gathering, a bear attacked our tent, ripped through the side to eat our food and drone is naked through the night against ten million mosquitoes and black flies.

After the gathering, we traveled down the road with some friends of mine named Forest and Diane to Montana to visit Barry and Sunny. When we got to Missoula, we seen Barry and Sunny and stayed with them for a month - during which time I fulfilled one of my worst fears. I caught herpes from Feather. Immediately after catching herpes, I caught chicken pox. I thought I might go sterile and die. But I got over all these afflictions and managed to keep a fairly centered head space.

In anticipation of organizing the Regional Southwest Gathering, I arrived back in New Mexico on the 13th of August. Now I'm waiting for the regional gathering to manifest, also to see what direction Feather and mine relationship will take...

...I beaded my death moccasins with clouds on the bottom, so I'm ready to go. My body will be sent to my parents and they'll put the moccasins on me. I've got a shirt made of the first two hides I'd ever tanned and they'll put that on me. I don't want to be buried in a coffin. I want my coffin up on poles like an Indian where the eagles can come eat me.

[Feather broke up with Crazy John. He went to the first Southwest Regional Gathering in October, 1983. After that there was a rumor that he died in a car wreck. Actually he was in prison for possession of LSD. When he got out, he went to the Southwest Regional Gathering in March, 1985]

337

An Afterword

[The incident John tells about Gypsy Jake and Two Feathers with the Indian skull at the 1977 New Mexico Gathering is of such a delicate nature that I got Two Feathers's side of the story, which follows.]

TWO FEATHERS

"I was just sitting there smoking dope and the next thing I knew, I put my hand on the ground and there was a fucking skull. I went and put it back exactly where I found it, where the ancient fire pits were.

"Then I went with Gypsy Jake to El Paso to get peyote and we spent 77 days in jail."